



THE INTERIM

A Monthly Newsletter of the Montana Legislative Branch

Volume XV, No. 16

Helena, Montana

September 2006

IN THIS ISSUE

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY COUNCIL	1
REVENUE AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE	1
ECONOMIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE	2
STATE ADMINISTRATION AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE	3
CHILDREN, FAMILIES, HEALTH, AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE	3
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL	4
LAW AND JUSTICE COMMITTEE	4
MONTANA LEGISLATIVE REFERENCE CENTER	5
THE BACK PAGE	7
BIG SKY, BIG RIDE	7
INTERIM CALENDAR	10

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY COUNCIL

Agency Oversight subcommittee hears public comment on wolf management...About 75 people attended a meeting on wolf management hosted by a legislative subcommittee last month in Ennis.

The Agency Oversight subcommittee of the Environmental Quality Council listened to more than four hours of public comment. Those who spoke hailed from Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, and South Dakota. Several hundred others submitted written comments.

The morning began with representatives from the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks and from Wildlife Services, which is part of the federal Agriculture Department, explaining the roles they play in wolf management.

Until July of last year, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which is part of the federal Interior Department, was the lead agency for managing wolves in Montana. But under a cooperative agreement, FWP is responsible for conducting population monitoring, research, and public outreach. The state agency also determines when non-lethal and lethal wolf-control actions are appropriate to reduce conflicts with livestock, although federal guidelines related to lethal control must still be followed. Because the wolf is still protected under the Endangered Species Act, hunting is prohibited until the wolf is delisted.

The topic of wolves came up at several EQC meetings in recent months. In July, the EQC voted to gather in Ennis after Rep. Diane Rice of Harrison told the panel about increasing wolf conflicts in the area. Other residents offered similar testimony at prior meetings. Among other duties, the Agency Oversight subcommittee has some oversight responsibilities for FWP.

The subcommittee sought comment on how the state is performing its duties under the agreement with the federal government as well as the management of wolves in Wildlife Management Areas, which are parcels of land owned by FWP.

The Agency Oversight subcommittee will likely revisit the issue of wolf management at its September meeting.

EQC meets in September...The EQC meets Sept. 11 and 12 in Helena. The EQC will review reports from its subcommittees and wrap up its interim activities. An agenda and other information will be posted on the EQC website at http://leg.state.mt.us/css/lepo/2005_2006/default.asp. For more information, contact Todd Everts at (406) 444-3747 or teverts@mt.gov.

REVENUE AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

Committee meets in September...The Revenue and Transportation Interim Committee meets Sept. 8 at 8 a.m. in Room 137 of the state Capitol. Terry Johnson will report on the status of the fiscal year 2006 state general fund. The committee will discuss proposals to revise and clarify access to tax and revenue information by the

THE INTERIM

Montana Legislative Services Division
Room 110, State Capitol
PO Box 201706
Helena, MT 59620-1706
Phone: (406) 444-3064
Fax: (406) 444-3036

THE INTERIM is a monthly newsletter that reports on the interim activities of legislative committees, including the Legislative Council, the Environmental Quality Council, the Legislative Finance Committee, the Legislative Audit Committee, and interim legislative committees and subcommittees staffed by the Legislative Services Division. Information about the committees, including meeting schedules, agendas, and reports, is found at <http://www.leg.mt.gov>. Follow the "Committees" link or the "Interims" link to the relevant committee. The newsletter is posted on the legislative branch website on the first of each month (follow the "Publications" link).

A Publication of **Legislative
Services
Division**

Legislative Fiscal Division and the governor's budget office for developing biennial revenue estimates. The committee will also review Department of Revenue and Department of Transportation legislative proposals for the 2007 session and will decide which proposals to request for drafting on behalf of the agencies for preintroduction. Other agenda items include:

- review of the definition and taxation of little cigars;
- update on the Oil Price Differential Task Force;
- update on the fiscal note working group, which consisted of members of the Legislative Council and the Legislative Finance Committee;
- review of a draft final report on the HJR 44 study of the taxation of certain oil and natural gas production property and review of an outline of other committee activities during the interim; and
- a Department of Transportation report on the inspection of diesel-powered vehicles and enforcement of special fuel laws.

Meeting material available electronically...An agenda and meeting materials may be found on the committee's webpage at http://leg.mt.gov/css/committees/interim/2005_2006/rev_trans/default.asp. Please check the committee's webpage for agenda updates.

For more information, contact Jeff Martin, committee staff, at (406) 444-3595 or jmartin@mt.gov.

ECONOMIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

National health care expert at final meeting...Dr. Henry Simmons, president of the National Coalition on Health Care, will discuss health care costs, coverage, and quality at the Economic Affairs Committee meeting Sept. 11. The committee's final meetings will be Sept. 11 and 12 in Room 102 of the state Capitol, starting both days at 8:30 a.m. Dr. Simmons' presentation will be at 9 a.m. The public and members of other interim committees are invited.

The nonprofit National Coalition on Health Care, founded in 1990, lists among its honorary co-chairs former Presidents George Bush, Jimmy Carter, and Gerald Ford. Its current co-chairs are former Gov. Robert Ray (R-Iowa) and former Congressman Paul Rogers (D-Florida). The coalition's website lists three interconnected problems that will be the focus of Dr. Simmons' presentation: concerns about the quality of health care, rising health care costs, and an increasing number of people without health insurance. Rep. Jim Keane, committee chair, led the effort to get Dr. Simmons to Montana after hearing him speak on health care issues at a conference of the International Foundation. For more information about the National Coalition on Health Care, see its website at <http://www.nchc.org>.

Decisions and duties...The committee will decide at the Sept. 11 meeting whether to propose as committee bills draft legislation on identity theft, studied under SJR 38, and on professional and occupational licensing boards, studied under SJR 35. As part of its statutory duties, the committee will review legislative proposals from the Department of Labor and Industry, the Department of Livestock, and Montana State Fund on Sept. 11 and from the Department of Commerce, the State Auditor's Office, and the Governor's Office of Economic Development on Sept. 12. Also on Sept. 12, presentations on economic development will feature Sen. Jeff Mangan and a group that is working on Montana's investment climate and, separately, the Montana Economic Developers Association. A draft of the committee's final report also will be discussed on Sept. 12.

Proposed committee legislation...The committee will decide whether to support as committee legislation the following ID theft bill drafts:

- LC8877, providing assistance for victims of ID theft;
- LC9894, funding for education relating to consumer protection;
- LC8888, security/credit freeze;
- LC8801 (and LC8800 original) adding government as an entity required to notify if a security breach results in a theft of personal identifying information; and
- C8801 (and LCzzzz and LC8899 originals) addressing use of social security numbers.

Draft bills involving professional and occupational licensing boards include:

- LC7799 as revised at an Aug. 1 meeting of the SJR 35 subcommittee, affecting creation of new boards and termination of boards; and
- LC9831 as revised, affecting joint meetings of boards, revision of quasi-judicial status of certain boards, proposing termination of the athletic agent program and changing the Board of Athletics to a program administered by the Department of Labor and Industry.

Other reports...Also scheduled are reports from legislators on the Rail Services Competition Council and from the Board of Private Alternative Adolescent Residential or Outdoor Programs.

Information on the web...Agenda and bill drafts are available on the committee website or from committee staff: Bart Campbell, Dawn Field, or Pat Murdo at (406) 444-3064 or bacampbell@mt.gov, dfield@mt.gov, or pmurdo@mt.gov.

STATE ADMINISTRATION AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Committee cancels September meeting, will meet in November...The State Administration and Veterans' Affairs Interim Committee will meet next on Tuesday and Wednesday, Nov. 28-29 in Helena. The Committee will focus on draft legislation that covers some aspect of public employees' retirement systems. The committee **will not** meet on Sept. 11 as originally scheduled.

Committee to review legislative proposals...Sections 5-5-215 and 5-5-228, MCA, require that the committee review legislative proposals that address some aspect of public employee retirement. Based on the review, the committee will prepare a report on the proposals that are introduced for legislative consideration. The report will include an analysis of each proposal and the committee's recommendation to adopt or reject the proposal.

At the June 22 committee meeting, state agencies presented several retirement system-related proposals. The committee authorized legislative staff to formally initiate the bill drafting process for the proposals. Additionally, legislators eligible to request bill drafts have submitted 16 other retirement system-related requests.

Between now and the November meeting, committee staff will work with state agencies' staff and legislators to develop the proposals into draft legislation. Once the draft bills are drafted satisfactorily, the agencies will obtain a specific legislator-sponsor for each draft. All agency bills must be preintroduced by Dec. 26 to allow the 60th Legislature to consider the bills as early in the regular session as possible.

All of the agencies' and stakeholders' proposals submitted at the June 22 meeting are available on the committee's website and all bill draft requests on retirement issues are available on the Legislative Services Division's website on the LAWS link. (Use the "Subject" search option and click on "Retirement".)

For more information...The November meeting is likely the committee's final meeting of the 2005-06 interim. A tentative agenda for the meeting will be posted to the committee's webpage as soon as it is available and will be kept updated as the meeting date approaches. For additional information, contact Dave Bohyer, committee staff, at (406) 444-3064 or dbohyer@mt.gov.

CHILDREN, FAMILIES, HEALTH, AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE

Final meeting rescheduled...The final meeting of the Children and Families Interim Committee is planned for Sept. 12 and 13. Draft legislation, meeting materials, and an

agenda will be posted to the committee's webpage by late August. The committee is asking for public comment on the draft legislation.

SJR 37 study of child protective services...The committee is considering four bill drafts related to grandparents raising grandchildren. Three of the drafts would provide grandparents a legal process by which they could, respectively, enroll their grandchildren in school, give consent for medical care, and have limited standing as caretaker relatives in certain cases when they are responsible for relatives who are minors. A fourth draft would clarify statutes on grandparent and grandchild contact based on the Montana Supreme Court decision in Polasek.

The committee will also consider a bill draft to establish a Child Protective Services Statute Revision Commission. The new commission, which would be attached to the Department of Justice, would review child protective services statutes focusing on court-related and legal processes and procedures and on how these processes and procedures affect the Department of Public Health and Human Services. An alternative proposal to make specific changes to the statutes may be presented to the committee--please check the committee's website often.

SJR 41 study of mental health crisis...Committee members are working on topics for the final meeting: secure crisis stabilization, suicide prevention, and the certification of mental health professionals and psychologists. Draft legislation includes parity in insurance for mental illness and chemical dependency. Draft legislation will include "gravely disabled" in the definition of "emergency situation" and a provision related to the "soft" transportation of the mentally ill. Bill drafts will be available by late August for review and comment by interested persons.

Committee to review agency legislation...DPHHS will present its legislative proposals on Sept. 13. The committee will decide on which proposals to request on behalf of the agency. The governor's budget office is finalizing the list of approved legislation.

Committee to prepare statement of priorities...At the final meeting, the committee will prepare a statement of its health and human services priorities to serve as a guide for the next Legislature as it considers proposals related to children and families, health and health care, and human services.

Opportunity for legislators--NCSL specialist on TANF to come to Helena...Jack Tweedie from the Denver office of the National Conference of State Legislatures will be in Helena on Sept. 11 and 12 to meet with legislators to discuss impending federal changes to the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families public assistance program. Because of the federal Deficit Reduction Act, impacts of the TANF program on the state general fund are possible, especially related to work participation rates and required activities. This is an

opportunity for legislators to learn about the impacts of and potential opportunities for TANF policy for the next session.

Tweedie will hold an informational session from 2 to 4 p.m. in Room 350 of the state Capitol on Sept. 11 and speak to the Children and Families Interim Committee the next day. Tweedie is available on both days to meet with individual legislators, groups of legislators, and others. For more information, or to schedule a session with Tweedie, please contact Marilyn Daumiller, associate fiscal analyst, Legislative Fiscal Division, at (406) 444-5386.

Ways to participate... Anyone wishing to participate in the activities of the committee is invited to contact Susan Byorth Fox at (406) 444-3066. Persons wishing to be on the interested persons list may subscribe for electronic notices at the committee website or contact Fong Hom at (406) 444-0502 to be placed on the hard copy mailing list.

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Council to review legislation, budget items in September... The Legislative Council will meet on Sept. 15 in Room 102 of the state Capitol. Agenda items for the next meeting include:

- a review of draft legislation;
- a review of outstanding proposals related to the public information officer and to interim committees;
- an update on the Computer System Planning Council plan;
- a review of 2009 biennium budget items, including the price-based bid on the MCA, the price of a set of proceedings, and the 2-year legislative budget;
- updates to the legislative session calendar, new legislator orientation, committee chair training, legislative training days, and flu shots; and
- an update on legislative branch pay rules and pay for performance.

Council bill draft requests... The Legislative Council has requested the following bill drafts:

- clarify motor vehicle registration fees (LC0073);
- revise laws governing Legislature (LC0134);
- revise fiscal note laws (LC0135);
- code commissioner bill (LC0136);
- revise travel reimbursement for legislators (LC0138)
- revise the deadline for submission of legislative budget (LC0139);

- provide for a PERS exemption for legislative session staff (LC0140); and

- gender-neutralize and conform language to bill drafting manual (Titles 1 through 7, MCA) (LC0141).

Information on the Web... The meeting agenda and bill drafts will be posted to the Legislative Council website. For more information, contact Susan Byorth Fox, executive director, Legislative Services Division, at (406) 444-3066 or sfox@mt.gov.

Activities to go on your calendar... A reminder to put the following legislative activities on your calendar:

- House and Senate caucuses: Monday, Nov. 27, 2006 (afternoon);
- Legislative Council: Monday, Nov. 27;
- New legislator orientation: Tuesday, Nov. 28 and Wednesday, Nov. 29;
- Committee chair training: Monday Dec. 11 (morning);
- House, Senate, and joint House and Senate rules committees: Monday, Dec. 11;
- Start of regular session: Wednesday, Jan. 3, 2007 (noon);
- Legislative rules training and civic education training: Wednesday, Jan. 3 (afternoon); and
- Law School for Legislators: Thursday, Jan. 4 (morning)

LAW AND JUSTICE COMMITTEE

Committee wraps up interim in August... The last meeting the Law and Justice Interim Committee (LJIC) for the 2005-06 interim was held Aug. 31. The LJIC wrapped up a full interim of activities on a variety of topics:

Topics	Activities
SJR 40 - study of prosecution services and whether to enact a district attorney model	LC0071 - developed a committee bill entitled "The Prosecution Services Act of 2007" to revise the funding of county attorney salaries (pending final action)

SJR 6 - study of civil legal services to low income Montanans

LC0072 - developed a committee bill entitled "The Access to Civil Legal Justice Act "

Topics

SB 146 from 2005 - oversight of the implementation of the Montana Public Defender Act

Activities

LC8888 - developed a committee bill to adjust the entitlement share reduction amounts used as the county share of funding for the new statewide public defender system (*actual LC number pending final action*)

HJR 15 - study of disproportionate minority contact in the criminal justice system

The LJIC held a roundtable discussion and public hearing on HJR 15 topics.

SJR 37 - study of child protective services (*assigned to the CFHHS interim committee with the understanding that the CFHHS would coordinate with the LJIC*)

The LJIC considered co-sponsoring with the CFHHS Committee a bill to revise child abuse and neglect statutes in Title 41, chapter 3, MCA.

Juvenile Delinquency Intervention Program (JDIP)

The JDIP emerged as a concern for the LJIC after legal staff found problems with rules being proposed by the Department of Corrections to implement JDIP. Several hearings and discussions have been conducted.

Agency monitoring and agency legislation requests
-- Department of Justice
-- Department of Corrections
-- Judicial Branch

The LJIC reviewed 37 bill draft proposals from the Department of Justice, 10 bill draft proposals from the Department of Corrections, and 2 bill draft proposals from the judicial branch. Key agency bill proposals include:

- a DOJ proposal to make seatbelt violations a primary offence;
- a DOC proposal to allow medical parole; and
- a judicial branch proposal to move administration of JDIP funding from the DOC to the judicial branch.

October issue of *The Interim*. For more information on LJIC activities, please go to the committee's webpage accessible through <http://leg.mt.gov> or contact Sheri Heffelfinger at (406) 444-3596.

MONTANA LEGISLATIVE REFERENCE CENTER

Legislative librarians select winners of notable document awards...Each summer, a small group of legislative librarians from around the country meet via conference call for the sole purpose of picking the best legislatively-oriented documents in the United States. It has been my privilege to chair this librarian group, which is part of the National Conference of State Legislatures' Legislative Research Librarians section, for the last three years. In the spring, we put out a call to legislative librarians nationwide to send in what they consider to be the best documents produced by their legislative staff. We judges carefully examine all the materials, evaluate them based on specified criteria, determine our award categories, and decide which documents are worthy of being awarded Notable Document status.

A "document" for purposes of this award is defined as one produced by a federal, state, or local government agency or by a foundation, consulting firm, or quasi-public or private sector nonprofit organization. Format includes print, microfilm, CD-ROM, periodical/serial, or URL.

Criteria for judging each document include whether the document significantly contributes to knowledge on a topic of concern to legislators; is innovative in its presentation of material; whether it compares state activities in an arena of contemporary legislative interest in a comprehensible manner; whether it expands understanding of government processes, functions, or relationships; and whether it attempts to provide balance and perspective from various sides in the political spectrum. The purpose of the Notable Documents award is to:

- formally recognize excellence in documents that explore topics of contemporary interest to legislators and staff by presenting substantive material in an outstanding format;
- advertise the extensive range of information available to legislators and staff;
- increase participation by legislative research librarians in the States Information Network; and
- encourage deposit of documents with NCSL and the Council of State Governments by subject-appropriate publishing organizations.

And, drum roll please, the 2006 Notable Documents winners are:

Legislatively mandated

The LJIC's final actions will be reported in the

- Idaho School for Deaf and Blind Evaluation Report (Idaho Office of Performance Evaluations): www.legislature.idaho.gov/oep/publications/reports/r0503.pdf
- Report of the Advisory Committee on Geriatric and Seriously Ill Inmates (Pennsylvania General Assembly, Joint State Government Commission): <http://Jsg.legis.state.pa.us/Inmates%20Report.html>

Citizen's guide

- Citizens Guide (series of five publications) (Kentucky Legislative Research Commission)
- Utah State Government: A Citizens Guide (Utah Office of Legislative Research and General Counsel)

Legislator's guide

- Understanding Medicaid: A Policymaker's Introduction (Utah Office of Legislative Research and General Counsel): <http://le.utah.gov/lrgc/briefingpapers/understandingmedicaid2005.pdf>

Student's guide

- Governing Wisconsin series (Wisconsin Legislative Reference Bureau): <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/lrb/gw/index.htm>

Public policy

- Improved Coordination and Information Could Reduce the Backlog of Unserved Warrants (Kentucky Legislative Research Commission)

- Use of Social Security Numbers for Drivers' Licenses, Permits, and Identification Cards: Federal Mandate Review (Idaho Office of Performance Evaluations): <http://www.legislature.idaho.gov/oep/publications/reports/m0501.htm>

Fiscal matters

- A Fiscal Review of the 2005 Legislative Session (Minnesota Senate Counsel, Research, and Fiscal Analysis): www.senate.leg.state.mn.us/departments/scr/freview/2005/fiscal_review.pdf

Historical and cultural resources

- High Plains of Northeastern New Mexico: A Guide to Geology and Culture (New Mexico Bureau of Geology and Mineral Resources)

All of these documents were excellent and were highlighted at the NCSL Annual Meeting in Nashville, as well as awards given to their authors during an awards lunch there. For more information on the Notable Documents program, please see ncsl.org/programs/lis/lrl/awards.htm.

Documents available from legislative library...If you're looking for some interesting reading and superior design, we have these documents in hard copy in the legislative library. If you have any questions, please contact Lisa Mecklenberg Jackson, legislative librarian, at (406) 444-2957 or ljackson@mt.gov.

THE BACK PAGE

BIG SKY, BIG RIDE

A Trip to Helena is Well Worth it, But Plenty of Other Ways to Stay in Touch

By Joe Kolman
Legislative Research Analyst

Montanans are proud of the big land we inhabit and the lengths we go to travel it. We sneer when telling out-of-state friends about driving 200 miles or more just for a morning meeting or to have dinner and see a show.

They gasp. We wave it off like it's no more trouble than yawning.

But during legislative sessions, trekking to Helena can be a grind for Montanans. Daunting winter drives may leave some feeling like they are too far away for their voices to be heard.

There are a couple of ways to look at this: First, it could be worse. As big as our state is, many of us are less removed from the seat of power than folks in other states. Second, thanks to technology, there are a few ways everyone from De Borgia in the west to Westby in the east can keep tabs on the session and sound off to lawmakers.

How are we better off than other states? I was sitting in a café in Joseph, Ore., last spring--having just driven across that fine state--when I realized residents in northeastern Oregon are closer to the capital of Idaho than they are to Salem. When I got back to Montana, I used mapping software and population data to see how many people in the West live within 200 miles of their respective state capitals.

Two hundred miles seemed like a reasonable day trip, at least for road hardy Montanans. If a particular piece of legislation piques your interest, it would be conceivable to drive to Helena to testify at the hearing, have lunch, watch a floor session, and still be home before the 10 p.m. news.

That is a full day, to be sure, but possible.

In Montana, at least 67 percent of residents live within 200 miles of Helena. Actually, the percentage is higher, but in doing the analysis I only included counties that were completely within the 200-mile radius. While the city of Billings fell within that distance, the rest of Yellowstone County didn't.

Even without counting Billings, we are a heck of a lot better off than Alaskans. Only 7 percent of them live within 200 miles of Juneau. And you have to book an airline ticket to get there.

Pity the poor Californians too. Almost two out of every three folks in the Golden State--including all those L.A. types--

are more than 200 miles away from Gov. Arnie and the rest of the gang.

Granted, the drive from Alzada to Helena is a butt killer, but the traffic is a lot less hectic than between Los Angeles and Sacramento.

To see how Montana compares to other states, see the map below.

Minimum Percentage of Residents, by State, Who Live Within 200 Miles of Their State Capitol



Despite the mileage, I recommend all Montanans come to the Legislature at least once in a lifetime if not more often. Consider:

- This is where it all happens. Many of the laws that affect daily life are made here: when you can run cows on the highway, what equipment you can use to catch a fish, where you can smoke, drink, and gamble, and some other stuff about taxes and such.
- You can say what you think. Every day, there are several hearings on a myriad of topics. You can walk into a room, wait your turn and then toss out your two cents. For those who want their voices heard, the best way is to let lawmakers hear those voices in person. It might only be for a few minutes, but it matters. Otherwise, Legislative Services provides a form via the web to email lawmakers, and the agency runs a dandy phone message system. (See Sidebar 1 nearby).

- The Capitol is cool. From the old Charlie Russell to the new stained glass, the building has the ability to make a person feel good. A tourist stopped me the other day and said, "You are really lucky to work here."
- Most folks are dressed up. It may be the only chance to see a lot of Montana men wearing a tie.

Despite all those reasons to come to Helena, the fact is that the vast majority of Montanans won't make it during the 2007 session. But they can still be informed, involved, and influential.

Back in the dark ages, if a resident of Noxon wanted a copy of a bill, somebody in Helena had to fax or mail it to them. They might as well just scratched out a copy on a stone tablet and put it on the Pony Express.

Now, anyone with Internet access can track bills through the whole process. You can search by your favorite lawmaker, a particular subject area, or by a keyword. My dad searches for legislation written by his favorite bill drafter. From the Legislature's website, <http://leg.state.mt.us>, the bill section will list legislation from the current session as well as those dating back to 1999.

A new feature of the website for 2007 will send email notification of hearings to multiple addresses. Round up the whole posse and come to Helena.

Or maybe the posse will want to gather around a computer or a television. Many folks in the state will likely be able to listen to legislative hearings and floor debate via the Internet at <http://leg.state.mt.us>. (This is how my dad spent some chilly afternoons in 2005.)

While watching the sausage grinder that is the Legislature at work may not seem like the next big television hit, it is a great reality show. Farmers, teachers, ranchers, loggers, lawyers, and business people all leave their ordinary lives and try to do what they think is best for Montana while trying to avoid the flu bug.

And it is popular, says Stephen Maly, the executive director for Helena Community Television, which has the state contract to provide coverage of the session. In 2005, the session was available on cable channel 11 in Helena and on public access channels in Billings and Missoula. Plans for the 2007 session are still being discussed.

"We are going to get off the Helena island," Maly says, "but how far and how wide is a matter of money and time."

The Legislature recognizes the importance of broadcasting the session. Under state law, the Legislative Services Division is responsible for developing and requesting proposals for gavel-to-gavel coverage.

According to statute, "Programming must always be intended to increase public understanding of both the substantive issues and the processes by which the legislature and other bodies seek to resolve problems, address challenges, and seize opportunities for the public good."¹

The public good is well served when residents seize the opportunity to be involved. Be it by car, phone, Internet, or television, Montanans have several options to be a part of the 2007 Legislature.

SIDEBAR 1

Just pick up the phone

In an age of email and text messaging, it's easy to forget that the phrase, "Let your fingers do the walking" used to mean dialing a phone--a rotary one at that.

But be it by landline, cell tower, or satellite, calling lawmakers is still a good way to keep in touch.

During the session, folks can leave messages at (406) 444-4800. A person calls in and the caller's name, address, and message are recorded in a database, printed out, and delivered to the desired lawmakers.

If last session is any indication, Montanans will keep the lines hot in 2007. A few interesting tidbits culled from the 2005 database²:

- Nearly 8,900 people left at least one message. Lots of them called more than once. One woman in Billings must have marathon-trained fingers, having called 123 times during the session. She called urging lawmakers to vote a certain way on a myriad of issues, often making several calls in the same day.
- In all, there were just more than 15,000 messages recorded.
- The busiest day was Feb. 21 with 555 messages. Among the hot issues that day was a bill that would have added various groups to the hate crimes law.
- Rep. Mark Noennig of Billings received the most messages with 471.
- The top 5 towns in order of callers were Helena (2,308), Billings (2,193), Missoula (1,500), Great Falls (1,049) and Bozeman (987).

¹Section 5-11-1111, MCA

²Thanks to Kevin Hayes, Casey Crites, and Steve Eller for providing data, insight, and analysis.

SIDEBAR 2What other states do

Here are some ways lawmakers in other states keep in touch with constituents, according to Bill Wyatt, the director of media relations for the National Conference of State Legislatures.

- **Blogs.** Blogs--kind of an online diary--are becoming more common. Legislators across the country use blogs to keep constituents up-to-speed with what is going on in the capitol. Through comment features, blogs also allow constituents to provide feedback.
- **Podcasts.** Many legislative staff produce downloadable audio and video files in an effort to bring the capitol to the constituents. Residents in Washington

can go to the state's public affairs broadcasting website and download (free of charge) audio or video of any legislative hearing or floor proceeding.

- **Conventional websites.** Most legislators maintain a personal website that allows constituents to communicate with them. Many provide useful community information, legislative updates, and some sort of feedback option.
 - **Cable Access / Talk Radio.** Some legislators take advantage of community access channels on their local cable system. They can often produce a talk show at the channel's studios for little or no cost. Also, talk radio is a great way for constituents and legislators to share information.
-



INTERIM CALENDAR

UNLESS OTHERWISE SPECIFIED, ALL ROOM DESIGNATIONS ARE IN THE CAPITOL

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
September 2006						
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7 Energy and Telecommunications Committee, Room 137	8 Revenue and Transportation Com- mittee, 8 a.m., Room 137	9
10	11 Economic Affairs Committee, Room 102, 8:30 a.m. Environmental Qual- ity Council Jack Tweedie, NCSL, TANF, Room 350, 2-4 p.m.	12 Economic Affairs Committee, Room, 102, 8:30 a.m. EQC Children, Families, Health, and Human Services Committee, Room 172	13 Children, Families, Health, and Human Services Committee, Room 102	14	15 Legislative Council, Room 102.	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
October 2006						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12 Legislative Finance Committee, 8 a.m., Room 102	13 Legislative Finance Committee, 8 a.m., Room 102	14
15	16	17	18 Legislative Audit Division, 8:30 a.m., Room 172	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

LEGISLATIVE SERVICES DIVISION
PO BOX 201706
HELENA MT 59620-1706